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EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst is an English language global Web journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing the Central Asia-Caucasus region. It serves to link the business, governmental, journalistic and scholarly communities and is the global voice of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University-The Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. The Editor of the Analyst solicits most articles and field reports however authors may suggest topics for future issues or submit articles and field reports for consideration. Such articles and field reports cannot have been previously published in any form, must be written in English, and must correspond precisely to the format and style of articles and field reports published in *The Analyst* (www.cacianalyst.org) and described below.

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Analytical Articles:

Analytical articles require a three to four sentence introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful judgment supported with concrete examples.

Analytical article structure: Ideal length between 1000 and 1200 words.

KEY ISSUE: A short 100-word statement of your conclusions about the issue or news event on which the article focuses.

BACKGROUND: 300-400 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

IMPLICATIONS: 300-400 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

CONCLUSIONS: 100-200 words that strongly state your conclusions about the impact of the event or issue.

Specifications for Field Reports:

Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an NGO. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed has for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 700-800 words.

Those interested in joining *The Analyst's* pool of authors to contribute articles, field reports, or contacts of potential writers, please send your CV to: scornell@jhu.edu and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

Svante E. Cornell

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MASS MEDIA TRANSFORMATION AFTER MARCH EVENTS IN KYRGYZSTAN

Anisa Borubaeva

The democratic revolution in Kyrgyzstan brought down its first president Askar Akayev. In the run up to the presidential election, the Acting Prime Minister Kurmanbek Bakiev promised to press forward with democratic initiatives in the country. As far as privatization of mass media goes, the election process exposed the government's superficial commitment to reform. Worse, journalists are increasingly formed into a pro-government bloc. Although the credit of popular trust in the newly elected president has not been exhausted yet, the failure to put promises into practice casts doubt on the future of democratic transformation in Kyrgyzstan.

BACKGROUND: The violent overthrow of the previous regime that took place on March 24, 2005 resulted in a dangerous power vacuum. The hopeful presidential candidate Kurmanbek Bakiev, who for the moment assumed the double roles of the acting president and the acting prime minister, promised to continue the revolutionary momentum. In particular, Bakiev called for the immediate privatization of state mass media. He went so far as to state several times that in the future, all newspapers except one, containing laws and government decrees, will be privately owned. Bakiev's optimistic remarks coincided with the general public mood of high hopes for better, and a more just and democratic future for the country. Representatives of civil society and independent mass media were especially enthusiastic about the acting president's proposals. Both Bakiev and interested observers repeated in unison that mass media reform is a guarantee of freedom of the speech and a building block of a competitive media market in Kyrgyzstan.

It was the electoral campaign that first indicated the lack of real reform commitment. Moreover, heads of state media outlets were the ones to ask for privatization to be put on hold. In a joint appeal to the government, they argued that, once privatized, mass media will be unable to survive competition, while the state will lose an instrument of establishing dialogue with the population, in particular concerning the

progress of political, economic, and social reform in the country. In its turn, Bakiev's government reverted to the use of administrative resources in the presidential election campaign.

With a majority of media outlets at Bakiev's side and regional administrations courting the most probable candidate, the result of the presidential election was self-evident. International observers preferred to ignore the fact that the amount of coverage of the elections was heavily skewed in favor of the leading candidate. The most obvious reason is the fear of more popular protests.

In the meantime, the post-election developments do not suggest that new authorities plan to stick to the earlier promise of reform. Recently, it was announced that KNTRK, the state television channel and the only channel in the country with 90% coverage, will not be granted public status. Another disturbing signal is that the government continues to impose subscription to official newspapers on the population. All these signs cause increasing amount of criticism on the part of civil society, independent mass media, and the population at large.

IMPLICATIONS: A troubling sign for the future of democracy in Kyrgyzstan is the sudden metamorphosis of many opponents of the former regime into staunch loyalists of the current government. The Acting Deputy Prime Minister Adakhan Madumarov, who

criticized former president Akayev for controlling official mass media in his own interests, now employs the same methods claiming that it is a matter of state security. The leading journalist of the MSN (Moia Stolitsa—Novosti) newspaper Rina Prizhivoit also went from being a voice of revolutionary change into a passionate supporter of the official government's line, attacking everyone with a different point of view as pro-Akayev (a label that is equivalent today to being a disloyal citizen). Justifying their actions by a desire to protect the gains of the revolution and avoid public protests, former opposition journalists today stay away from raising difficult questions. What is worse, they do not seem to tolerate any critical voices challenging the new administration.

Heads of state mass media are uneasy with the prospect of privatization. After losing state support that is critical in guaranteeing stable subscription numbers, they will find themselves unpopular and uncompetitive in the media market. Therefore, both state mass media and the government share an interest in preserving the status quo, which is a bad omen for the reform program. Many independent journalists and observers have come to the conclusion that today in Kyrgyzstan there is less freedom of the speech than during Akaev.

This aversion to greater freedom of speech was corroborated after the elections when the government announced that KNTRK would not become public. Instead, the government diverted public attention to public television, which supposedly will be established on the basis of the southern television channel "Osh-3000." It is widely agreed that "Osh-3000" is unlikely to become a nation-wide public channel, not only because its technical base is lacking, but most importantly, because the channel covers only the southern region of the country. Therefore, it seems more likely that the government is simply diverting attention from the lack of real reform by launching secondary projects, which, however, are clearly

unviable by default. It must be added that there is no excuse for avoiding real reform for economic reasons, because international donors have been more than generous in their offers for the cause of reforming the Kyrgyz mass media. The government and state mass media representatives alike have brushed away these offers and instead resorted to methods of controlling mass media, methods that are so familiar to Kyrgyz people.

CONCLUSIONS: Widely seen as a voice of the democratic revolution, the new government in Kyrgyzstan easily passed the test of public popularity. However, challenges that lie ahead will require considerably more than just populist promises. So far, unfortunately, the electoral campaign and the post-election developments indicate that the new regime is wary of implementing real democratic reforms, most importantly the reform of mass media. Moreover, the regime has found allies in former opposition journalists who were responsible for championing the Bakiev candidacy during the revolution as well as during the presidential elections. Close allies of the present regime, state and private pro-government mass media act to effectively suppress freedom of the press by attacking independent journalists and their dissenting views, labeling them as pro-Akaev and unpatriotic. At the same time, they themselves avoid contentious issues and invariably take the government's side. In this context, when independence of mass media—one of the critical components of democracy—is being compromised, the overall commitment of the Bakiev government to further democratic development comes under serious question.

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PROGRESS ON ABKHAZIA HANGS IN BALANCE, IN NEED OF INFORMED EXTERNAL SUPPORT

Jaba Devdariani

In Summer 2005, the peace process in Abkhazia hung in the balance. Progress in economic projects and conciliatory remarks by both sides were offset by large-scale military maneuvers held in the breakaway Georgian province with an implicit nod from Russia. The window of opportunity for a settlement remains open, but for confidence-building to be successful, a multilateral mediation format must move beyond the Russia-first approach. By moving towards more active cooperation in economic projects and the security field, Abkhaz and Georgian leaders take political risks. Western involvement is necessary to reassure both sides and to create a more secure environment for further talks.

BACKGROUND: In 2005, the new authorities of Georgia and Abkhazia have studied each other's approaches towards the political settlement process. Several informal, closed-door meetings were held in Europe, under the patronage of various international agencies and NGOs. The meetings in a formal and slightly more publicized, UN-led "Geneva process" framework showed that there is room for progress in negotiations.

Notably, the Georgian authorities made practical steps to re-open railway communication with Russia via Abkhazia – a project economically beneficial for all involved sides, as well as for Russia's regional ally, Armenia. Official Tbilisi has, for the first time, de-linked its agreement on the railway from the political issue of returning Georgian displaced persons to Abkhazia. Georgian and Abkhaz officials and professionals have also cooperated directly and productively on rehabilitation of the Inguri Hydropower station, wedged on the administrative border of Abkhazia and Georgia proper. Tbilisi also offered to sign an agreement on non-resumption of hostilities, to alleviate Abkhaz fears of imminent Georgian military invasion.

In a statement that comes closest yet to admitting responsibility for the Georgian authorities' launching the armed conflict in Abkhazia in 1992, the Presidential Representative for the Abkhaz conflict, Irakli Alasania, said on the anniversary of

the beginning of the conflict on August 14 that the Georgian government's decision to send troops to Abkhazia in 1992 "was a big mistake which led to a huge tragedy." In a similar, reluctantly conciliatory manner, one of the staunchest Abkhaz hardliners, the head of the Abkhaz security council Stanislav Lakoba, did not exclude a possibility of "some kind of confederation" with Georgia in his interview to Regnum news agency on August 8.

These positive gestures were tarnished by several statements of Abkhaz leader Sergey Bagapsh, made during and after his visit to Moscow in mid-August. Bagapsh argued that all ethnic Georgians that spontaneously returned to their homes in Abkhazia's Gali province should accept Abkhaz or Russian citizenship to be able to remain in Gali. If they want to maintain Georgian citizenship "they might cross the river" Bagapsh said, implying the river Inguri that divides Abkhazia from the rest of Georgia. He also spoke for toughening entry requirements to Abkhazia for "persons with Georgian passports." Words were followed by deeds, as around a dozen Georgians, mostly loggers, were detained on charges of crossing the border illegally. The Abkhaz side also denied entry to Georgian experts in a trilateral Russo-Georgian-Abkhaz working group to assess the technical state of the Abkhaz portion of the railway, on the grounds that they were displaced persons from

Abkhazia. The Georgian foreign ministry protested this “discriminating action” to the Russian authorities, but Moscow accused Tbilisi of impeding the process by “politicizing economic issues.” The assessment continued without Georgian participation, seriously undermining the political position of official Tbilisi in support of re-opening the railway.

The large-scale military exercises held in Abkhazia on August 14-19 were most harmful for the budding détente. More than six thousand servicemen, heavy armament, tanks, artillery, navy and aviation participated in an exercise which simulated repelling a sea-landing invasion by Georgian troops. The training was arranged by the Abkhaz chief of staff, Russian general Anatoly Zaytsev who previously served as Soviet military advisor to Syria. Bagapsh stated that Abkhazia will welcome mid-ranking Russian officers into the Abkhaz army.

Tbilisi was irked by the inaction of the Russian peacekeepers, whose commander admitted to *Kommersant* daily that the exercises took place in restricted-weapons zone, but defended his acquiescence by the fact that “Georgians conduct the trainings too.” Officials also claimed that Abkhazia’s coffers could not afford two large-scale exercises in a space of several months, hinting at possible Russian financial support.

IMPLICATIONS: The future of the peace process in Abkhazia hangs in a precarious balance. On one hand, new leaders recognize the need for normalization and are willing to move beyond old political clichés. On the other, suspicions and mistrust persist, impeding the process. The conflict was a painful experience for both nations, and gave rise to recalcitrant hard-line positions. On the Abkhaz side, this is expressed in extreme, exclusive nationalism and dragging out peace negotiations with the aim of maintaining a beneficial *status quo*. From the Georgian side, hardliners usually speak of military action as the only possible solution to the conflict.

The new elections brought pragmatist politicians to power both in Tbilisi and Sukhumi. They discern

the practical shortfalls of the hardliner views and are willing to move beyond them, the political environment permitting. But radical views enjoy strong following in both Abkhazia and Georgia, forcing leaders who cannot afford to lose face to demonstrate that there are tangible benefits to be delivered by a détente. Under these conditions, confidence-building and the role of external mediators is vital.

Russia is not a trusted mediator in this process. Tbilisi saw covert Russian participation in the 1992-94 conflict as a decisive factor for the conflict’s outcome. Peacekeeping forces stationed in the conflict zone are not considered to help reconciliation, but to effectively guard the Abkhazia’s border with Georgia. Heavy Russian investments in Abkhaz real estate, political ties, and recent actions regarding the railway leave no room in Georgia to consider Russia an honest broker. Russian military advisors and possibly mercenaries are thought to play an important role in propping up the hardliner agenda in Abkhazia. Both Abkhaz Defense Minister Sultan Sosnaliev and chief of staff Anatoly Zaytsev are Russian citizens and former military officers, something that can become a destabilizing factor in peace talks. Bagapsh recently stated that Abkhazia’s maximum military budget is around US\$ 2.9 million, while some 10% of its eligible voters are in the military. Even if exaggerated, these numbers indicate the extent to which military expenditure is a drag on the devastated Abkhaz economy.

While the Georgian administration understands the need for Russian participation in any Abkhazia settlement, Tbilisi sees the involvement of other powers in the negotiating process as a necessary precondition for reducing the risk of a resumption of hostilities, and for reaching a political solution. But Western participants have maintained a “Russia-first” approach, and have so far done little either to react to the apparent stalemate or to realize the potential for progress.

The new, pragmatic leaderships emphasize new sets of agendas and the negotiation process needs to adapt accordingly. For Abkhazia, economics now

top the agenda. For its part, Tbilisi wants to see the rights of ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia better protected. Economically, Abkhazia is overwhelmingly dependent on Russia, something Moscow has not failed to exploit. During the contested Abkhaz presidential elections of October 2004, Russia forced the winner at the ballot box – Bagapsh – into an unholy alliance with Moscow’s favorite, his rival Raul Khajimba, by simply blocking the border for several days.

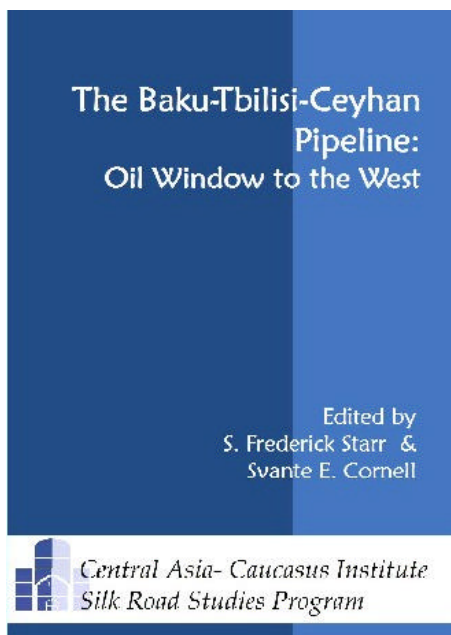
Western involvement in conflict resolution can hence also be of an economic character. In a recent meeting with the Ambassadors of the Group of Friends, the Abkhaz leader expressed interest in investment projects, hinting that Russia’s overwhelming political role was a result of its superior participation in helping Abkhazia recover. Western financial assistance to Abkhazia has a chance of winning Tbilisi’s approval, especially if it is conditional on non-discrimination of Abkhazia residents of Georgian ethnicity.

Abkhaz authorities also signal their willingness to expand and legalize cooperation with Turkey, where many ethnic Abkhaz reside. Allowing for the legalization of such contacts can also be a subject of negotiations, whereas currently the Georgian Coast Guard is tasked to detain any ships that head towards the Abkhaz capital of Sukhumi without clearing Georgian customs.

Faced with what appears to be European inaction on Abkhazia, Georgia pins its hopes on the new U.S. Ambassador John Tefft, who during his confirmation hearings in Washington D.C. prioritized the resolution of “frozen conflicts” in Georgia. Outgoing Ambassador Richard Miles confirmed during a meeting with Abkhaz officials that the U.S. is planning to play a “more active role” in the negotiating process.

CONCLUSIONS: By moving towards more active cooperation in economic projects and the security field, Abkhaz and Georgian leaders take political risks. Western involvement is necessary to reassure both nations and to create a more secure environment for further talks. Russia’s peacekeeping role has managed to “freeze” the conflict, but has failed to achieve political progress. New avenues for “unfreezing” the conflict non-violently present themselves as the focus of attention of the Abkhaz politicians shifts towards economic security, while Georgian authorities are concerned with human rights situation in Abkhazia, mainly related to the rights of the ethnic Georgian returnees.

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The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Oil Window to the West

Edited by S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell

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CHINA'S ACQUISITION OF PETROKAZAKHSTAN: A BLESSING OR A CURSE?

Hooman Peimani

On August 22, China National Petroleum Corp. (CNPC) announced its acquisition of PetroKazakhstan. CNPC purchased the Canadian-owned company, which is a major Kazakhstan's oil company, for \$4.2 billion shortly after a Chinese bid to buy the U.S. oil company Unocal failed due to mounting opposition among the American politicians. While China's interest in Central Asia's vast energy resources is not a secret, the recent development indicates Beijing's moving into the region's energy industry with a more aggressive policy aimed at securing access to fuel resources. The inevitable corresponding political influence for China suits the Central Asians seeking the involvement of a growing power in their region to balance the influence of Russia and the United States.

BACKGROUND: The independence of the Central Asian states in 1991 opened a new arena for the Chinese to expand both economically and politically in a neighboring region of significance to their national security. In search of fuel for its growing economy, the prospect of securing access to the region's significant oil and gas resources has been yet another incentive for China in determining their policies towards Central Asia. In this regard, many small and large plans have been envisaged of which the majority is yet to be implemented. Beijing's mainly disappointing record in making a major inroad in the Central Asian oil industry in the 1990s inclined it to look elsewhere in search of long-term supplies of oil and gas. Among them, its 30-billion dollar contract with Iran concluded in 2005 has been prominent. Despite its apparent significance, the Chinese consider it as only one step towards securing major oil suppliers with friendly ties with Beijing. It is therefore not enough to guarantee fuel security for China in need of multiple long-term suppliers to meet its large and fast-growing fuel requirements.

IMPLICATIONS: Against this background, the \$4.2-billion acquisition of PetroKazakhstan is a major step for China in its efforts to achieve fuel security through an adequate number of reliable and diversified fuel suppliers, although PetroKazakhstan's access to oil resources is not significant enough to allay China's concern for the continued growth of its economy, highly dependent on imported oil. Yet without a doubt, the contract manifests China's success in entering Central Asia's fossil energy industry as a player to reckon with, a region whose vast fossil energy resources and its geographical location as a neighbor make it a natural supplier to China.

While it is a definite indicator of China's growing economic presence in Central Asia, the acquisition of PetroKazakhstan serves as a reminder to the rest of the world, and particularly the United States, that China is not only determined to satisfy its long-term fuel requirements to sustain its economic growth, but it has both options and means to achieve that objective. Although PetroKazakhstan's assets are significantly smaller than those of

UNOCAL, Beijing's successful purchase of that oil company shortly after its failure to purchase UNOCAL revealed its planning and determination to achieve its objective despite setbacks.

Having said this, the importance of PetroKazakhstan for China's energy requirements, and thus its economic significance, is only one aspect of Beijing's successful acquisition. In fact, an equally, if not more, important aspect is its political salience. On the one hand, China's expansion in Central Asia's strategically important fossil energy industry will inevitably increase its political clout and expand its political and security engagement there. Similarly, energy dependence on Central Asia will make China more concerned about that region's peace, security and stability only to make Beijing more interested in such active political and security involvement.

On the other, China's growing economic presence and its corresponding political one will be a welcome phenomenon for some in Central Asia. In search of a force to decrease Russia's role and influence in their region, they have considered the United States as a balancer and thus a welcome power to help them preserve their independence. However, Washington's growing political, economic and, since 2001, military presence in the region has also become a source of concern. Hence an increasing number of Central Asians are questioning the wisdom of such presence, which, some fear, would likely lead to increasing American domination of Central Asia. More than that, the three colored "revolutions" in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, credited rightly or wrongly to Washington's manipulation of their opposition forces, have created a sense of fear of American expansion in Central Asia. Such fear has been

evident in Uzbekistan's implicit and in some cases explicit accusation of U.S. involvement in the May 2005 "uprising" or "terrorist activity" (depending on different accounts of the event) in Andijan and its subsequent demand for the closure of an American air force base in its territory within six months.

Within this context, officials in Central Asia may see a merit in China's growing presence in Central Asia, including in the regional fuel industry, as a large power with a stake in their stability and means to balance the U.S. and Russian influence. Ironically, such a balancing role so far has the blessing of Moscow, which is concerned with expanding American influence in its southern neighborhood.

CONCLUSIONS: China's growing energy requirements will certainly motivate it to increase its share of the Central Asian fossil energy sector. The large but yet mainly underdeveloped oil and gas resources of its neighboring region is irresistible to China. This is especially the case since Washington's concern about a rising China will likely make it difficult to secure Chinese access to oil and gas resources owned or controlled by American corporations in various parts of the world. China's growing dependence on imported fuel will turn Central Asia into an arena for Beijing's expansion. Russia's expanding ties with China for economic and military/security considerations are in the short term likely to eliminate its opposition to, and conflict of interests with, China.

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REFORMING THE PAKISTANI MADARIS

Naveed Ahmad

In a knee-jerk reaction, the predominant majority of the Pakistani madaris has en bloc rejected the much-publicized and long-awaited plan of mainstreaming the institutions accused of brainwashing youth and imparting religious extremism. The ulema from all school of thoughts question various clauses of the newly-amended law which governs the registration process, particularly those seeking financial monitoring and information access for the government.

BACKGROUND: The Pakistani religious schools (madaris) have been in the international spotlight since 9/11. British investigators' initial claim that two of the suspected July 7 London suicide bombers had attended madaris in Pakistan proved a real catalyst, thus forcing General Musharraf to threaten the religious schools to register themselves with the government by December 31 or face closure. While the move has given impetus to the country's inefficient bureaucracy, the religious schools by and large reject the exercise "being carried out under foreign pressure".

Following the 1979 USSR invasion of Afghanistan, large sums of money were injected into Pakistani religious schools to educate Afghan children growing up in refugee camps and brainwash them against the non-Muslim Soviet occupation of their land. Saudi Arabia and the U.S. were major suppliers of money. In Pakistan, it is also widely believed that even the syllabus preaching Jihad, under fire these days, was prepared in the U.S. in the Cold War era, long before it was taught in Pakistani seminaries.

Historically, the first ever madrasa was set up in the Prophet's (PBUH) mosque in Madina shortly after his migration to the city from his hometown Mecca, where students sat on rough mats woven of date-palms and memorized, internalized, and acted upon what was being taught to them by the Holy Prophet himself. This prototype of the madrasa was then taken to cities as far as Samarqand and Bukhara in Central Asia and Timbuktu in Africa. The madaris then proliferated to cities such as Baghdad, Basra, Kufa, Samarqand, Ghazni, Lahore, Multan, Deoand, Berali and Damascus.

To give the exercise a 'flawless' legal cover, General Musharraf promulgated an ordinance amending the Societies Registration Act of 1860, requiring the 11,882 seminaries in the country to register with the government. The amendment settles a conflict between the ministries of education, interior, and religious affairs, with the former two seeking a new law for registration and the latter agreeing with the madaris to make use of the Societies Act.

Under the presidential ordinance, a new section has been added to the act, providing that no seminary will operate without getting itself registered. The four provincial governors also followed suit and promulgated similar legislation to ensure no religious school stays out of the registration net. According to the new law, madaris are institutions which provide boarding and lodging facilities while maktabas (junior schools) are institutions where these facilities are not offered and students are taught religion and the holy Quran in mosques. The ordinance also seeks the submission of audited reports by seminaries along with a list of donors.

Until 1996, the religious schools had been registering with the government but Benazir Bhutto's government stopped this practice for unknown reasons. The ensuing period saw the unmanaged proliferation of madaris all across the country, the majority being based in the North-West Frontier Province and the populous Punjab province.

IMPLICATIONS: Initially, the religious schools accepted the Musharraf-promulgated ordinance and showed willingness to register with the government, but later the most influential boards, Wafaqul Madaris Al-Arabia and Tanzeemul Madaris (Bareilvi) refused to register religious

schools under the amended Society Registration Act of 1860. The two board or wafaqs run approximately 9,000 schools, out of a total 12,000.

The country's largest and most influential madrasa boards accuse the government of defaming religious schools and hold that some aspects of the ordinance, including the requirement for government approval in financial matters, raids on religious schools and a campaign against jihadi literature, were unacceptable. In fact, the alliance of five boards of religious schools – Ittehad Tanzeemat Madaris Deeniah – have reservations about the amended ordinance, especially its provision about submitting their audit reports to the registrar.

Also, the ulema of these schools of thoughts are not cooperating with the government in repatriating foreign students by the deadline of September 30. The Pakistani government has so far deported a number of foreign students in line with a decision made on August 7 following criticism from the West after the 7/7 London bombings. The students so far repatriated were studying in seminaries in the coastal metropolis of Karachi and mainly came from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Somalia, Uganda and Surinam.

In the Muslim world, Pakistani religious schools are known for their quality education in Islamic disciplines. Most of the foreign students are living in Pakistan on visitor visas and they normally have their return ticket with them, thus posing little problems to the government in their repatriation process. The government has never offered a study visa to students joining religious schools. Government figures suggest that there is a total of 1,400 foreign students in Pakistan, 600 of which are based in Karachi and adjoining rural districts.

Yet another bone of contention between the government and the religious schools is the amendment in the syllabus of the students.

Critics of US 'war on terror' say that it does not prove at all they are churning out terrorists. However, a sizeable number of seminaries have already started formally teaching English, Mathematics, science and computer as additional subjects since 2001. Madaris in remote and poor parts of the country still have to introduce the newer changes in their syllabi.

CONCLUSIONS: Why is the Musharraf regime not succeeding in streamlining the religious schools? The madaris are extremely autonomous and see outside, including governmental, interference with great suspicion. As the religious schools neither seek money from the government nor any privileges, they want to exercise freedom.

Undoubtedly, General Musharraf has little credibility amongst religious circles after allegedly bending backwards before the United States and other western powers to seek legitimacy for his military rule after September 11, 2001. He is using the son of late President General Zia-ul-Haq, who spearheaded the insurgency against the Soviet Union in the 1980s, to sell the reforms to the madaris. On the ground, the well-respected son of a pro-jihad Pakistani president has minute success in promoting Musharraf's 'enlightened moderation' as a vision for peace. The moment he glorifies Musharraf, the religious students chant full throat slogans against him.

The post-7/7 crackdown on seminaries, involving the arrest of some 300 ulema followed by the registration deadline and the repatriation of foreign students come as fatal blows to the entire reform exercise started in late 2001. Leading religious scholars suspect that the government will recognize Israel and relinquish its position on Palestine and Kashmir once it strangles the dissenting voices from the madaris on ideological issues. The most recent public meeting between the Israeli and Pakistani foreign ministers in Istanbul has created even bigger fissures within the ideologically divided nation.

Looking at its performance report over the madaris issue, the Pakistani government and its western allies seem to have little capacity and commitment to reach a middle ground, keeping in mind the sensitivities of both the sides. Reforming madaris in Pakistan is not just a religious, legal or procedural matter but it is an equally sensitive subject political as well as socially.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Naveed Ahmad is an investigative journalist, broadcaster and academic whose work regularly appears in the *The News International* and *Newsline*. He also hosts a 30-minute current affairs talk show, *Insight*, for Radio Pakistan's News and Current Affairs Channel.

FIELD REPORTS

SMOOTH REGISTRATION PROCESS FOR AZERBAIJANI ELECTION CANDIDATES SURPRISES OBSERVERS

Alman Mir Ismail

On September 6, the two-month long registration process for candidates to Azerbaijan's Parliamentary elections finished. Whereas both domestic opposition and international organizations were expecting harassment and artificial barriers for contenders, the process generally turned out to be smooth. The upcoming elections will be the first-ever all-majoritarian elections in the country, generating a great deal of interest among politicians. 2,062 candidates were, marking the highest number of candidates in any Parliamentary election in the country.

This rather significant improvement in the registration process comes partly as a result of intense pressures from international organizations as well as a desire on the part of authorities to hold relatively freer and fairer elections to avoid velvet revolutions similar to those in Ukraine and Georgia. According to official statistics from the Central Election Commission, 2,237 persons applied to the district election commissions for signature forms, and 2149 of them have returned completed signature forms. Under pressure from the Council of Europe, the Azerbaijani Parliament earlier this summer adopted a number of amendments to the Election Code, one of which was the reduction of requirements for the candidates to get registered. The number of required signatures for registration was reduced from 2,500 to 450. This subsequently allowed many candidates to register.

Another positive feature of the registration process was the high number of non-ruling party members

that registered for the elections. While the ruling party, YAP, registered 432 candidates, the number of registered independent candidates reached 968 and opposition parties fielded more than 350 candidates. Even opposition leaders Isa Qambar of the Musavat party and Ali Kerimli of the Popular Front party, in addition to a dozen high ranking opposition activists, were registered without major problems. It should also be noted that 188 (9%) of the registered candidates are women and 446 (22%) are young candidates aged 25-40.

Meanwhile, the registration of two other prominent oppositionists who are currently in exile has added extra praise for the ruling regime. Rasul Guliyev, Chairman of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party and currently living in exile, was barred from participation in the 2003 Presidential elections, yet this time his registration was without problems. Immediately, however, the General Prosecutor's office ordered to lift his candidate immunity, and threatened to arrest him should he come back to Baku. Guliyev is accused of embezzlement of state funds in the amount of \$80 million when he was Head of the petroleum refinery in Baku in the early 1990s. ADP officials claim that the case is fabricated to prevent his return. Local experts are unable to explain why the authorities have registered him and then immediately lifted his candidate immunity. A similar situation unfolded with the co-chairman of the Social Democratic party and former President of Azerbaijan, Ayaz Mutalibov.

The elections are expected to be very competitive. Most of the districts have more than 15 candidates from a wide range of the political spectrum, and one district in Baku even has 37 candidates. YAP has fielded its strongest and most high ranking persons in the regions outside of Baku, and the opposition has done so in the capital. Local analysts believe that this is done because of the massive international observation effort which will probably focus mostly on Baku.

Meanwhile, this week the U.S. embassy in Baku announced the name of the U.S. company that will conduct, for the first time ever, an exit poll during the parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan. PA Consulting Group was selected by USAID as the company to conduct this exit poll. Opposition parties and independent candidates are very hopeful

that the exit poll will deter fraud in polling stations and further ensure a democratic process in these elections.

The next phase of the campaign is devoted to campaigning, which will last until November 5. Hundreds of candidates are expected to go door-to-door and try to win the hearts of voters. In this task, it will be crucial that local authorities not create problems in their meetings with voters. President Ilham Aliyev has instructed all local governors not to interfere with the electoral process and has fired the deputy governor of the Salyan district for doing so. It will remain to be seen if this will teach other local officials a lesson.

TURKMENISTAN: CABINET CLEANSING ON THE RISE

Chemen Durdiyeva

On August 12, Turkmenbashi the Great with his entourage paid a special visit to Balkan, the most oil-rich area of the five velayats in Turkmenistan. During the period of this sudden visit, Mr. Niyazov gathered top officials directly leading the work in oil and gas sector, and publicly dismissed Mr. Saparmammet Veliyev, former minister and chief of the State Oil and Gas Concern Turkmenneft. As Mr. Veliyev was sacked on the basis of numerous charges, his removal turned out to be the next step in the latest cleansing among the President's Cabinet members.

Not long ago, Mr. Niyazov fired Yolly Gurbanmuradov, his deputy prime minister over charges of embezzlement of major state funds, property theft and abuse of his government position. Mr. Gurbanmuradov was also charged with illegally signing contracts with foreign firms. Soon after this, President Niyazov removed Mr. Rejepov, the former Minister of Construction and

Construction Materials over similar charges. Now the turn appears to have reached Mr. Veliyev, one of the most senior government officials.

Mr. Veliyev has been President Niyazov's most trusted and longest serving government official, and did not face major criticisms from the president since he assumed office. For Veliyev's distinguished work in oil and gas production, Mr. Niyazov personally awarded him with the honorary title "Hero of Turkmenistan." In Turkmenistan, one needs to go through a demonstrably hard task at work in order to qualify for "Hero" status, and currently ca. five people in Turkmenistan, including 'President Niyazov himself, hold this honorary award. However, all Veliyev's state awards and even his personal freedom appear to be lost as ongoing extensive investigations confirm.

So far, Mr. Veliyev has been accused of misappropriating state property and funds, serious flaws at work, and promoting tribalism in his

region. Reportedly, he overstated the oil output and sold roughly 100 tns of crude oil to foreign firms. The missing amount was to be delivered to the Turkmenbashi state refinery. In addition, as Turkmenbashi claimed, Mr. Veliyev, with the purpose of accruing personal benefits, provided three foreign firms with 4,000 tons of gas pipes taken directly from President Niyazov's reserve foundation. "Why do you do this? Why do you betray your country?" furiously asked Niyazov in front of Mr. Veliyev's colleagues. According to reports given by law enforcement agencies, Mr. Veliyev willingly promoted his own tribe "Chukan" and spread nepotism at major workplaces in the oil and gas sector in Balkan. Mr. Veliyev was also highly criticized for having several wives, which is illegal under the criminal code of Turkmenistan.

Turkmenbashi ordered the office of the Prosecutor General to give a full account of the charges taken against the former minister. In this connection, Mr. Niyazov created a special investigative group consisting of representatives from the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of National Security, and the Prosecutor General's office. "What we have here is only 20 percent of investigations yet" said Niyazov. But Mr. Veliyev, after more than half an hour of the president's criticisms, confessed in front of TV

cameras and said that he fully takes responsibilities for the charges against him. "I plead guilty and I will never be able to expiate my guilt. I could not deserve the faith you entrusted to me. You, [Mr. President!] ..., please forgive my guilt!" said Mr. Veliyev.

"There won't be any excuse for you, neither will we offer you a job. Go sweep the street and that will be your job now," said Niyazov. During the Cabinet session of August 22, the Prosecutor General, Ms. Kurbonbibi Atajanova updated the President on ongoing investigations in the case. It was reported that \$9.5 million and Manats 1 billion in cash, 21 multi-storey houses, 20 cars, and 5 weapons were confiscated at his residencies. The total amount of the damage Mr. Veliyev is believed to have caused to the state amounts to at least \$80 million. After these figures came out, Turkmenbashi deprived Veliyev of all state awards, honorary titles and personally order his imprisonment.

According to President Niyazov, the level of crime in Turkmenistan has gone down immensely during the last years and the only crimes committed are related to abuse of power among government officials. If such is the case, and as Niyazov's most trusted Cabinet member is sacked, it remains to be seen who is next.

ARMENIA RESPONDS TO KARS-AKHALKALAKI RAILROAD PROPOSAL

Grigor Hakobyan

The transportation ministers of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey met in Ankara on August 24 to discuss the Kars-Akhalkalaki railroad construction project. It should be noted that the meeting was preceded by a "Declaration on the creation of international transport rail corridor Kars-Tbilisi-Baku", signed jointly by the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey in Baku on May 25th, 2005. The proposed

railroad will be able to link the economies of Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan and become the main regional transit infrastructure for shipping thousands of tons of cargo from Europe to Asia and vice versa.

The Kars-Akhalkalaki railroad will stretch 98 km and cost \$500- \$800 million. Turkey's share of construction would be 68 km while the remaining

would be the responsibility of Georgia. The Armenian daily Azg commented that "The idea of a Kars-Akhalkalaki railroad emerged in the 1990s, but it wasn't implemented for three reasons: the construction is very expensive, passes through a region that is difficult to traverse, close to the Kars-Gyumri-Tbilisi railway that connected Georgia with Turkey in Soviet times." According to an unnamed diplomatic source quoted by Azg, the Azerbaijani lobby was able to replace discussions pertaining to potential construction of a Kars-Batumi railroad with those about building the Kars-Akhalkalaki railroad during Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's visit to Ankara last May.

Azg questioned why Azerbaijan would be interested in building a railroad via the predominately Armenian-populated Akhalkalaki region when "taking into account the current Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, Azerbaijan should not be interested in connecting with friendly Turkey through this very territory". Therefore, Azg concluded that the construction of the Kars-Akhalkalaki railroad pursues the following two goals: first, increasing the influence of Georgian central authorities in the Armenian-dominated province of Javakheti and second, maintaining control over the bulk of Armenia's exports, which the Georgian budget greatly benefits from. "It's worth mentioning that from a merely economic viewpoint, the improvement of Armenian-Turkish relations, particularly the opening of an Armenian-Turkish border-gate and the utilization of the Kars-Gyumri railroad are not in the interest of Georgia, as Armenia transfers its goods mainly through Georgian territory. The opening of the Armenian-Turkish border would mean that the Georgian state budget will be deprived of income from the transportation of Armenian goods".

While contemplating what benefits Azerbaijan may derive from such a controversial venture, Azg argued that Azerbaijan can be connected to Turkey through the railroad and that by joining the Azerbaijani, Georgian and Turkish railroad networks, Armenia will appear in greater isolation.

Besides, the opening of the Kars-Gyumri railroad would hardly be on the agenda after the Kars-Akhalkalaki railroad is built.

Meanwhile the authorities in Armenia expressed a different perspective on this issue. During his July 24th visit to Georgia, Armenia's Prime Minister Andranik Margaryan said that "the building of the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi railroad is an internal affair of Georgia, which is seeking to maintain railroad communications with Turkey. Meanwhile, I think that it would be less expensive to restore communications along the Kars-Gyumri-Tbilisi vector than building a new railroad."

Margaryan's suggestion seemed to have been preceded by a statement made by the Coordinator of the European Union's program in Armenia, Sebastien Dubost. Mr. Dubost has been quoted as stating that "when the Kars-Yerevan-Baku railway is put into operation, Armenia's transit role will become more important. The restoration will not require much funding, as the railway is in good state of repair."

Speaking on the same topic, Armenia's Minister of Transportation Andranik Manukyan stated that "the Armenian part of the railway and the border terminal are in perfect technical condition. We are also ready to provide beneficial transit tariffs to the Turkish side." Manukyan stated the same already in April 2004: "We have already prepared the Gyumri-Kars line to receive goods. Our part is totally ready", he has stated then.

In the past, efforts to resume Kars-Gyumri railroad communication were also supported by Armenian and Turkish entrepreneurs across the border. One of the groups campaigning for the opening of the Kars-Gyumri railroad was the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council. However, the current state of affairs pertaining to this project could be described as a time of uncertainty since Turkey continues to refuse the establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of railroad communications with Armenia as long as the issue of Mountainous Karabakh is not resolved.

ASTANA GETS CHINESE TROJAN HORSE FOR PETROKAZAKHSTAN

Marat Yermukanov

Oil-hungry China made another important step in securing access to key energy resources of Kazakhstan as it bought PetroKazakhstan, the largest Canadian-based oil company operating in Kazakhstan. Analysts wonder what benefits Astana can get from this multi-billion deal. What seems to be obvious so far is that Beijing is set to expand its economic presence in the energy sector of Kazakhstan, using for this purpose the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and bilateral economic agreements.

The Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) triggered off a flood of controversial comments in Kazakhstan as it agreed to pay \$4.18 billion to buy the Canadian-listed PetroKazakhstan oil company operating in South Kazakhstan. What seemed to be the biggest takeover deal ever made in Kazakhstan by a Chinese company left an aftertaste of national humiliation and a sensation of fragility of Kazakhstan's position in dealing with its oil-thirsty great neighbor. To begin with, the Chinese side did not deem it necessary to consult with the Anti-Monopoly Agency of Kazakhstan, as Article 18 of the law on regulation of competition between Kazakhstan-based companies requires. Formally, the Anti-Monopoly Agency of Kazakhstan had certain leverages to reject the Chinese bid to purchase PetroKazakhstan, but to the disappointment of defenders of national interests who found that the acquisition of PetroKazakhstan assets by CNPC violates 1998 law on national security, the Kazakh government missed the opportunity to influence the deal. Although an anonymous representative of CNPC is reported to have said that the Chinese company discussed the planned takeover with the Kazakh government, such statements disseminated by the Chinese Xinhua news agency sound hollow. In fact, the

Kazakh government was manifestly ignored by CNPC executives.

Paradoxically, government officials in Astana looked deeply ignorant of the Chinese-engineered behind-the-scenes game around PetroKazakhstan until the last moment. It was first believed that Russia's Lukoil and India's ONGC oil companies had equally good chances to acquire PetroKazakhstan shares. Even having purchased PetroKazakhstan, India would hardly draw any considerable economic benefit from the deal, as it would have to use Russian territory for shipment of Kazakh oil. Kazakhstan also loathes the idea of falling into economic dependence on Russia for shipment of its oil. China, a country where according to experts, oil consumption rose by 33% last year (compared to 11% in India), has far greater import potentials than any other country. Apart from that, in the highly politicized energy sector, Kazakhstan has to make some political concessions to its big neighbor, sometimes sacrificing its own economic interests. For that reason, Kazakh officials did not resist the Chinese bid for PetroKazakhstan's shares. However, some analysts warn that giving priority to Russian and Chinese directions in oil shipment routes, Kazakhstan runs the risk of economic and political intervention of the two great powers into the internal affairs of the country.

All recent developments in the oil sector clearly signal that Beijing is, slowly but firmly, gaining new footholds in Kazakhstan's oil sector. In essence, the purchase of PetroKazakhstan by CNPC is part of well-planned Chinese calculations directed at amassing the entirety of oil extracting, processing and shipment infrastructure of South Kazakhstan in a single hand. Using the much-publicized Atasu-Alashankou oil pipeline from West Kazakhstan to Xinjiang province, China gets a very reliable tool to

exert political pressure on Kazakhstan as the major buyer of Kazakh oil. Only few in the government circles realize that by signing rash contracts in the oil sector and adopting short-sighted labor migration policies, they are paving the way for Chinese dominance in the region. Kazakhstan opens its doors to Chinese companies at a time when other oil producing countries, including the cases of Russia's Slavneft three years ago and American Unocal recently, refrain from selling their assets to the Chinese. Since 2004, PetroKazakhstan came under relentless pressure from the government for allegedly monopolizing the fuel oil market and violating the Labor Code of Kazakhstan. The synchronized clamorous campaign against PetroKazakhstan was joined by the financial police, the anti-monopoly agency and environmentalists who staged protest rallies in front of the company's offices. Some observers suspect that president Nursultan Nazarbayev stood behind these campaigns. There are reasons to believe that these pressures on PetroKazakhstan were aimed at forcing the company into acceptance of a deal with the Chinese. Kazakhstan has commitments of economic cooperation with China within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Besides, the Chinese oil market with its enormous consuming potentials is much more attractive than the Indian or Russian options.

In economic terms, Kazakhstan had nothing to gain from the purchase of PetroKazakhstan by CNPC. One of the likely big losses for the country's

economy was the Shymkent oil refinery in South Kazakhstan, bought by PetroKazakhstan some years ago for merely \$60 million. Many observers were impressed by the multiple billions of dollars poured by the Chinese to buy PetroKazakhstan, which accounts for 12% of the country's oil output. The Chinese declared their readiness to pay \$55 in cash for every PetroKazakhstan share. This generosity shows that China stops at nothing in its drive to get access to Kazakhstan's energy resources. The policy of economic expansion is coated with the need of developing cooperation and good-neighborly relations.

China is also setting its eyes on power-generating facilities in the Pavlodar region of North Kazakhstan. It appears that Kazakh officials yielded to a Chinese offer of building an energy complex in the region to produce and export electricity to China. Chinese companies never tire of declaring their seemingly benign intentions of developing the oil and social infrastructure of Kazakhstan. But Astana is increasingly concerned over the growing migration of Chinese workers into the country, which poses demographic and cultural challenges. An employer at a bookstore in Almaty told this author last week that he sold out all Chinese-language manuals within a few days. But Beijing has more important business in Kazakhstan to attend to than language learning.



Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
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NEWS DIGEST

CIS LEADERS WANT KAZAKHSTAN TO HEAD OSCE IN 2009

26 August

A Commonwealth of Independent States summit on Friday expressed support for Kazakhstan's candidacy for the 2009 chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Russian President Vladimir Putin said at the summit, held in Kazan, Russia. (Interfax)

TURKMEN BOOK 'BLASTED INTO SPACE'

27 August

Turkmenistan's idiosyncratic President, Saparmurat Niyazov, has found an unusual way to spread his message - by sending his writings into space. Part One of the Ruhnama was blasted off on a Russian Dnepr booster rocket from Kazakhstan's Baykonur launch site on Wednesday, local media said. People are obliged to read Mr Niyazov's book, an interpretation of Turkmen history, for moral guidance. Known as Turkmenbashi, or Turkmen father, he has ruled from Soviet times. He has created a vast personality cult around himself, issuing decrees regulating behaviour in all walks of life. He has been named president-for-life, his portrait hangs everywhere in Turkmenistan, and streets and towns have been named in his honour. The container, which also included a Turkmen flag and presidential standard, was launched as part of a mission to place two Japanese research satellites in orbit. "The book that conquered the hearts of millions on Earth is now conquering space," said an article in the official Neitralny Turkmenistan newspaper. The container is being described as an "artificial satellite". Turkmen TV said it was expected to orbit the Earth for the next 150 years. The Ruhnama, or Book of the Soul, whose first part was published in September 2001, is studied daily in Turkmen schools and adults are obliged to read it every Saturday. Its second part was published three years later. The launch was reported days after Mr Niyazov signed a decree banning the playing of recorded music at public events, weddings and on TV. He said there was a need to protect Turkmen culture from "negative influences". (BBC)

TURKMENISTAN DISTANCES ITSELF FROM CIS

27 August

Turkmenistan has downgraded the status of its membership of the CIS to that of an "associated member," the press service of Turkmenistan's Foreign Ministry reported. The ministry stated that the

participants in the CIS summit in Kazan received a message from Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov, who did not attend, "with a request to take into account Turkmenistan's neutral status and support its position to participate in the CIS as an associated member." The report noted that the request received preliminary approval from CIS member states. (Turkmenistan.ru)

ARMENIAN, AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENTS MEET

29 August

President Kocharian met on 27 August in Kazan on the sidelines of a CIS summit with his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev to discuss approaches to resolving the Karabakh conflict, news agencies from both countries reported. The two presidents first met one-on-one and then were joined by the co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group but, contrary to expectations, not by Russian President Vladimir Putin. No details of the specific issues discussed were made public, but Armenian Public Television on 27 August quoted Kocharian's press secretary, Viktor Soghomonian, as characterizing the talks as "a positive development in the negotiating process." Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov similarly described the talks as "important" while admitting, "I cannot say there has been any major progress or breakthrough." (RFE/RL)

UZBEK COURT SENTENCES REPORTER TO SIX MONTHS

29 August

Nosyr Zakirov, a correspondent for RFE/RL's Uzbek Service, was sentenced to a six-month prison term on 26 August for slandering a state official, Interfax reported, quoting the journalist's son, Zokhid Zakirov. Arena, a website detailing free-speech issues in Uzbekistan (www.freeuz.uz), quoted the younger Zakirov as saying: "My father was put in jail for his professional activities. He did a radio program on the views of Haydarali Komilov on the events in Andijon, where [Komilov] in poetic form harshly criticized the policies of the country's leadership." Zakirov explained that his father later called State Security Service officer Dilmurod Isamukhamdov to express his anger that the latter pressured Komilov into retracting his earlier statements. The call led to the charges against Nosyr Zakirov. The correspondent's son said his father was taken to prison as soon as the verdict was announced on 26 August. Although Komilov later retracted his statements about Andijon, he still faces

criminal charges in connection with the incident, Arena reported. (RFE/RL)

AFGHAN OPIUM PRODUCTION 'DROPS'

29 August

Afghanistan has registered a drop in the cultivation of opium for the first time since the fall of the Taleban, the United Nations says. The area under cultivation for opium has dropped by 21%, says the head of the UN Office for Drugs and Crime. But the actual output has not changed much and Afghanistan is still the largest producer of opium in the world, accounting for almost 90% of supplies. The opium poppy is the raw material for producing the drug heroin. "Obviously we're very pleased, because it's the result of restraint by farmers - an active decision which is important," said Antonio Maria Costa, director for the UN Office for Drugs and Crime. He said there were several reasons for the decline, including government pressure and efforts to persuade farmers not to grow the crop. He said there were several reasons for the decline, including government pressure and efforts to persuade farmers not to grow the crop. But he also called on the government to remove governors in those provinces where opium cultivation has not come down. "The governors should be punished, they aren't punished enough," the AFP news agency quotes Mr Costa as saying. "They should be removed or jailed." 'Narco-state' The UN has previously voiced fears that Afghanistan could turn into a "narco-state" if it failed to bring the drug trade under control. On a visit to Washington earlier this year, President Karzai pledged to reduce opium farming by 30% during 2005. The international community has spent millions of dollars on drug eradication programmes in Afghanistan since 2001, when the Taleban was ousted. The BBC's Andrew North in Kabul says with little progress in tackling heroin processing operations and traffickers, the drugs trade still poses a major threat to Afghanistan's future. (BBC)

GEORGIA PLANS CENSUS OF CHECHEN REFUGEES IN PANKISI GORGE

30 August

The Georgian Refugee Ministry will carry out a two-week census of Chechen refugees living in the country's Pankisi Gorge. Last year's registration showed that the area was home to 3,843 refugees from Chechnya. Nearly 1,300 of them have left Georgia mainly for third countries over the past year. A mere 24 refugees have returned to Russia. Meanwhile, non-governmental organizations said no more than 1,000 Chechen refugees are living in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge today. (Interfax)

CHECHNYA EXPECTS FAIR VERDICT ON ULMAN - ALKHANOV

30 August

Chechen President Alu Alkhanov welcomed the decision by the Russian Supreme Court's Military board reversing the not-guilty verdict handed to Captain Eduard Ulman and his group. "We hoped that there are people in the judicial system who will objectively evaluate the actions of Ulman and his accomplices and arrive at a just ruling on his case," Alkhanov told Interfax on Tuesday. Now everything depends on how the Military Tribunal of the North Caucasian military district will approach the new investigation and make a new decision on this case, he said. (Interfax)

UAE PRESIDENT TO VISIT TURKMENISTAN IN 2006

31 August

Turkmen President Saparmurad Niyazov and President of the United Arab Emirates Khalifa bin Zayid Al Nahayyam's envoy Sultan Khalfan Al Ketbi have reached an agreement allowing for a visit by the UAE president to Ashgabat in early 2006, the Turkmen presidential press service told Interfax. (Interfax)

GUERRILLA GROUP DESTROYED IN CHECHNYA

31 August

Chechen police have eliminated a guerrilla group which had been organizing terrorist attacks against top republic and federal troop commanders, Chechen Interior Minister Ruslan Alkhanov told Interfax on Wednesday. "A guerrilla group which planned to carry out large-scale terror attacks was eliminated in the village of Novoterskoye, in the Naurskaya district, on Wednesday morning. The group had caches of shoulder-held grenade launchers, flame-throwers, submachine guns and other ammunition," the minister said. (Interfax)

RUSSIAN BORDER GUARDS END MISSION ON TAJIK-AFGHAN BORDER

1 September

Russian border guards have transferred control of the last sector of the Pyandzh border sector to Tajikistan, deputy head of the Russian Border Service Lt. Gen. Viktor Trufanov told Interfax on Thursday. "The last sector of the Afghan-Tajik border under the control of the Pyandzh unit of Russian border guards was transferred to our Tajik colleagues on September 1 in conformity with the intergovernmental agreement. From now on Tajikistan will protect the border unaided," the general said. Russia will keep some of its border guards in Tajikistan, he said. "A task force of the Russian Federal Security Service's Border Service has been deployed in Tajikistan," he said. (Interfax)

BESLAN MOTHERS REQUEST POLITICAL ASYLUM ABROAD

1 September

The Beslan Mothers Committee on Thursday circulated an appeal by victims of last year's school siege in Beslan, urging foreign governments to grant political asylum to the parents and relatives of the victims. "We, the parents and relatives of the victims killed in the terrorist attack on School No.1 in Beslan on September 3, have lost all hope for a fair investigation into the causes of our tragedy and for finding the perpetrators. We do not want to live in this country, where human life does not mean anything. We are requesting political asylum in any country where human rights are observed," the Beslan Mothers said. "We have been waiting patiently for nearly a year for words of truth about the savage murder of our relatives and for the day when the perpetrators are brought to account. However, time and the authorities have shown us that the truth will never be spoken, because it is absurd and horrible," the organization said. The authors write that they have been betrayed by "politicians, officials and law enforcement officers" and that they have been "driven to despair and have lost hope of hearing the truth about those responsible for the murder" of their relatives. (Interfax)

U.K. BACKS AZERBAIJAN LINE ON NAGORNO-KARABAKH - MINISTRY

1 September

Britain backs Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's line on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry cited British Ambassador to Azerbaijan Laurie Bristow as saying at a meeting on Thursday with Azerbaijani Defense Minister Safar Abiyev. Bristow also said at the meeting, held in Baku, that Azerbaijan was working successfully to settle the conflict, according to a ministry release. (Interfax)

SUSPECTED INGUSH PM ATTACKER KILLED

2 September

A guerrilla leader, suspected of helping to organize recent assassination attempts on Ingushetia's Prime Minister Ibragim Malsagov and Nazran police chief Col. Dzhabraïl Kostoyev, was killed in a sweep operation on Friday, sources in the republic's Federal Security Service branch told Interfax. "It was established early Friday morning that Mirzoyev was hiding in one of the houses in the village of Karabulak, he was given an opportunity to surrender, but started shooting. The building where he was hiding was surrounded and civilians were evacuated from nearby houses. The guerrilla was killed during the operation," one of the sources said. (Interfax)

KYRGYZ NATIONAL BANK HEAD PLACED UNDER HOUSE ARREST

2 September

Kyrgyz National Bank Chairman Ulan Sarbanov has been placed under house arrest. "The Prosecutor General's Office issued a decree regarding National Bank head Ulan Sarbanov on September 2," Prosecutor General's Office spokesman Sumar Nasiza told Interfax on Friday. "This decision was made as part of the criminal case opened to look into steps by the National Bank head to hand over more than \$400,000 to Kyrgyzstan's ex-president Askar Akayev in 1999," he said. (Interfax)

GEORGIA INTERESTED IN NORMALIZING RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA - ZOURABICHVILI

2 September

Georgian Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili said her country is interested in bringing relations with Russia back to normal. "Both parties applaud the progress they have made regarding the withdrawal of Russia's military bases from Georgia, but further steps need to be taken," she said. "Relations with Russia should be normalized in fact, not only in words. Work is underway in this direction," the minister said. Zourabichvili hopes that "both parties will take other moves this year to bring their relations back to normal." Georgia attaches great importance "to assuming the role of one of the leaders of new movements and tendencies in the region, a goal [the country] is trying to achieve," she said. (Interfax)

INGUSHETIAN PRESIDENT'S SECURITY CHIEF SHOT AT IN NAZRAN

2 September

The Ingush president's security chief has come under armed attack in Nazran. "At approximately 2 p.m. a man, armed with what is believed to have been a Makarov pistol, opened fire at the Ingush president's chief of the security Ruslanbek Zyazikov, a law enforcement source told Interfax on Friday. Numerous 9-mm cartridge cases were found at the scene." "By chance Zyazikov was not hurt," the source said. Bodyguards and OMON riot police caught the attacker, called Ismurziyev, on the spot. Early reports say Ismurziyev is a member of a militant group. (Interfax)

ACTIVISTS OF EXTREMIST MUSLIM GROUP DETAINED IN KAZAKHSTAN

2 September

Kazakh law enforcement and security agencies have detained the organizers of a rally of the organization Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is banned in Kazakhstan for its extremist views. Ten Hizb ut-Tahrir activists, among them, as was previously reported, a Russian citizen, were detained on Friday afternoon during an unsanctioned rally near the main mosque of Pavlodar, an administrative center in the northern part of the country,

a police source told Interfax on Saturday. The young men "were calling on Muslims to unite against a U.S. aggression" and spreading leaflets. The rally was reported to have gathered about a hundred people. Most of them had come to the mosque to attend a day religious service. All the detainees are been held at a remand facility. The opening of a criminal case under a Criminal Code article dealing with "the establishment of or involvement in the activity of illegal public or other associations" is under consideration. (Interfax)

JAPANESE TOURISTS CONFIRMED DEAD

3 September

Doctors say two bodies found in southern Afghanistan on Thursday are those of missing Japanese tourists. They said dental records have confirmed the identities of Jun Fukusho, 44, and Shinobu Hasegawa, 30, both teachers from Hiroshima. The head of the pathology department at Kabul University, where autopsies took place, said they had been shot dead. The bodies were found near the main road between Kandahar and Pakistan. The tourists went missing on 8 August. They had apparently entered the country from Pakistan to go sightseeing, Japanese diplomatic sources said. Hassan Halemi, head of pathology at Kabul University, said: "After four hours of testing, we realised that both bodies are those two Japanese. Both were shot dead." He said it appeared they had been dead for three weeks at least, killed by bullets to the head. The Japanese foreign ministry has confirmed the identities and notified the families. The junior high school teachers had travelled to Pakistan on 6 August and were expected to return to Japan on 19 August. Tourists are rare in Afghanistan, particularly in the south and east, where armed criminal gangs and Taleban fighters are active. However, two Taleban commanders told Associated Press the group had not kidnapped or killed the two. Kandahar provincial governor Asadullah Khalid said he thought the killings may have been carried out by a criminal gang. (BBC)

ATTACKS KILL EIGHT AFGHAN POLICE

4 September

At least eight Afghan policemen have been killed by suspected Taleban rebels in attacks across southern Afghanistan. Three policemen were killed when rebels ambushed a convoy of trucks transporting supplies for the US military in Zabul province. Another five were killed in an attack in neighbouring Helmand province, where a candidate in forthcoming elections was seriously injured in a bomb blast. The Taleban has stepped up attacks ahead of the 18 September polls. More than 1,000 people have been killed in the upsurge of violence in the past six months.

PRESIDENT ILHAM ALIYEV RECEIVES OSCE CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE, SLOVENIAN FOREIGN MINISTER DIMITRIJ RUPEL

5 September

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has received at the Presidential Palace the OSCE delegation headed by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, on September 5. During the meeting the two sides discussed the negotiations on the settlement of Armenia-Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and prospects of the problem's settling, the preparations for the forthcoming parliamentary elections in our country, the cooperation between Azerbaijan and OSCE, and other issues of mutual interesting. (Azertaj)

NO TALKS ON FUTURE OF U.S. BASES BEFORE NORMALIZATION IN AFGHANISTAN - BAKIYEV

5 September

Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev has said that the future of U.S. military bases in Kyrgyzstan will not be discussed until the situation in Afghanistan is brought back to normal. Bakiyev was speaking at a press conference in Moscow on Monday. (Interfax)

RUSSIA RAPS GEORGIA FOR LACK OF ACTION TO STOP ATTACKS ON RUSSIANS

5 September

The Russian Foreign Ministry has accused Georgia of not doing enough to prevent attacks on Russian citizens on its territory. "The Foreign Ministry of Russia notes with concern the growing number of crimes against foreigners, including Russian citizens, in Georgia and the absence of proper counter-measures on the part of Georgian authorities," sources in the ministry's information and press department told Interfax on Monday. The ministry offered its comment in response to an attack on Russian NTV television journalists in the Georgian village of Napareuli on September 3. (Interfax)

CHINA OIL COMPANY DENIES PLAN ON KAZAK CO.

6 September

A Chinese state-owned oil company denied a news report Tuesday that it is negotiating to sell part of a major oil producer in neighboring Kazakhstan to a Kazak state-owned company less than a month after agreeing to buy the firm. China National Petroleum Corp. agreed last month to pay \$4.2 billion for Canada-based PetroKazakhstan Inc. The Asian Wall Street Journal, citing unidentified sources, said CNPC was negotiating to sell up to 50 percent of the company to state-owned KazMunaiGaz. "Right now, we don't have any such

plan," said a CNPC spokesman, who would give only his surname, Liu. The Journal quoted the vice president of PetroKazakhstan as saying he hadn't heard about talks between CNPC and the Kazak oil company. The bid for PetroKazakhstan came amid a massive effort by Beijing to secure foreign energy supplies for its booming economy, whose dependence on imported fuel is soaring. The Journal said the possible price of CNPC's deal with the Kazak company wasn't clear. The report described the possible deal as part of a trend toward governments of oil-producing nations exerting more control over their energy resources at a time of high oil prices. Kazakhstan, a vast, sparsely populated former Soviet republic of some 15 million people, is expected to become one of the world's largest oil exporters. The discovery of its vast Kashagan field on the Caspian Sea in 2000 prompted some in the industry to call it the "Kuwait of Central Asia." An agreement by CNPC to sell part of PetroKazakhstan to a Kazak state company could help to smooth approval of its agreement to buy the Canadian firm. (AP)

FORMER KYRGYZ PM TO REMAIN IN CUSTODY UNTIL PROBE ENDS - PROSECUTORS

7 September

Kyrgyzstan's ex-prime minister Nikolai Tanayev, detained while attempting to leave Kyrgyzstan, will

remain under arrest until the end of the investigation, spokesman for the Kyrgyz Prosecutor General's Office Almaz Daryldayev told Interfax on Wednesday. Tanayev, accused of embezzling state resources, had personal guarantees, issued by a group of Kyrgyz parliamentary deputies which, however, did not give him the right to go abroad, the spokesman said. Tanayev's Russian defense lawyer Maxim Maximovich told Interfax on Wednesday that Tanayev's arrest is "illegal." "Tanayev did not plan to go into hiding, or let down those who had vouched for him. He needed to go to Almaty for urgent personal reasons. Neither luggage, nor any large sum of money were with him. On September 7, Tanayev planned to attend a tennis tournament in Bishkek, but was forced to travel to Kazakhstan for personal reasons." Maximovich said. The lawyer said he will demand his client's release from custody. (Interfax)

SERVICEMAN KILLED IN BLAST IN DAGESTAN 7 September

A serviceman was killed as a result of an explosion on the outskirts of Khasavyurt. The blast reportedly occurred when an engineer reconnaissance unit was combing a street, a spokesman for the Khasavyurt Interior Department told Interfax on Wednesday. The incident is under investigation. (Interfax)

